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102/secrets

1987 to 1989

Prior to the Cuban Missile Crisis: before October 14, 1962

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probably partly stimulated by Kennedy's choices to build up strategic forces in 1961 and 1962 even after the missile gap was disproven in September 1961 (after which McNamara's persistent claim that the US buildup was simply a response to exaggerated estimates of Soviet forces is clearly false). *See his the short gap; when did*

(E) *11.* Nor do they acknowledge the impact of repeated threats of possible US first-use or first-strike made by McNamara and Kennedy in 1961-62 (RFK is also quoted in the WGBH series); or the impact of a decision to expose Soviet strategic nuclear inferiority publicly in Gilpatric's speech of October, 1961 (which I proposed and drafted). *when learned.*

In other words, just as in their suppression to this date of information about US covert "pressure" on Cuba and plans for direct intervention, these officials fail to acknowledge any responsibility for provoking by US choices --some of them highly questionable, even apart from this possible consequence--in the strategic realm.

D (X) *12.* 10. High-level staffwork on the possible motives and impact of Soviet deployment of MRBMs/IRBMs in Cuba in August and September 1962 (e.g., NSAM on August 23, Harry Rowen memorandum). *(X) less of surprise than claimed; + surprise (to Pres) for different reasons.*

D (X) *13.* 11. Unprecedented secrecy--culminating in the PSALM clearance--imposed on handling within the intelligence community of evidence relating to "offensive weapons" in Cuba, after Presidential assurances to the public and warnings to the Soviets in September. *(Could this relate to use in nationalizing allied/invasion?)*

D (X) *14.* 12. Actual availability of evidence--convincing to some analysts and officials, including Nitze (though not to most, and evidently not brought to the President's attention)--of the presence of Soviet missiles, some days prior to the October 14 U2 flight (forming the basis for its scheduling). *(Anderson?) ref?*

D (X) *15.* 13. The equivocality--and the actual wording--of "assurances" given by Soviets, such as Dobrynin, about the "defensive character" of Soviet military aid to Cuba, in contrast to later charges--as a major justification for US military action--of unequivocal Soviet deceit. (The one clearly-established case of of unequivocal deception, from Khrushchev and Mikoyan via Georgi Bolshakov, seems to have arrived at the White House after the missiles had been discovered and US military action had been decided upon). *see*

During the Missile Crisis: after October 14.

D *16.* 14. The actual initial reactions of various principals on learning of the presence of the missiles, prior to the first ExComm meeting on the morning of October 16. In particular, Paul Nitze's judgment in the evening of October 15 (having learned of



the missiles several days earlier) that invasion and airstrike had to be ruled out as too bloody and risky--and that we would just "have to eat them," i.e., reluctantly accept their presence. Dean Rusk, discussing this with Nitze, concurred.

(Nitze, in his interview with Blight and Welch, mentions this discussion but omits to say what his opinion was of possible US responses, or his conclusion; nor are these revealed--indeed, for any of those informed before the meeting--in any other source. Rather, there are frequent--false--assertions that no principal, unless possibly Stevenson, seriously entertained even momentarily the thought of making no military response to the Soviet deployment.)

- D 17 15. Likewise, McNamara's own response, Tuesday morning October 16; that it had been a mistake for the President to make the warning he did on September 13--he had so advised the President--and there would be no crisis if ~~he had not~~. *quote*

- D 18 16. Suggestions by both Taylor--Chairman of the JCS--and McNamara in the ExComm meeting of October 17 (the first with the President not present) that the presence of the missiles might be accepted without any military response, since as McNamara put it, they made no significant difference in the strategic balance, and they constituted no military threat justifying response. *that the President had followed his advice. (see Pres; and Lunsford)*

These suggestions--quoted in my transcript of Nitze's unpublished notes of October 17 and never cited in any prior discussion--are in sharp contrast to the general assertions cited above, which have been accepted without question in all existing accounts. Thus, those who did not--contrary to all these accounts--take it for granted without hesitation that an active military response was justified and called for, included the Secretaries of State and Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: along with the Assistant Secretary Paul Nitze, who along with Chairman Maxwell Taylor was later counted as a principal hawk. Judging by their positions thenceforth, the Deputy Secretaries in both State and Defense, George Ball and Roswell Gilpatric, almost surely were in this camp.

- B (1985) 19 17. Repeated discussion by several participants (not only by Stevenson, uniquely "exposed" in this respect by Barlett and Alsop in December 1962), McNamara in particular, prior to the President's speech of October 22, of the acceptability and probable necessity of a trade of the missiles in Turkey (and possibly other concessions, perhaps including Guantanamo). *quote*

- D (+1985) 20 18. Indication by the President on October 20--as shown in Nitze's notes, but cited by others earlier--that he regarded such a trade as acceptable and even probable--not, as McNamara was still describing it publicly, on the WGBH account shown this year, as "inconceivable"--and that he differed with Stevenson *quote*



only on the question of when to mention this negotiation option (not, the President decided, in the speech announcing the blockade, as Stevenson urged, but only after the blockade had been implemented).

21. It is actually consistent with this--though a very significant revelation, if confirmed--that in the Moscow meeting on the crisis this year, Dobrynin is reported to have asserted that RFK himself in some fashion had introduced the suggestion of the Turkish trade as a possibility, in meeting with Dobrynin on Tuesday night, October 23: at the least (reports are vague, and perhaps Dobrynin's account was, too) RFK said something that led Dobrynin to raise the possibility in his cable of the meeting to Moscow). (If this is true, McNamara, and others, might or might not be aware of it).

22. 19. The possibility that as early as Friday, October 19 (if not earlier) some officials, including McNamara and perhaps the President, had decided fairly strongly against airstrike or invasion at all--given the possibility that some missiles were already operational and might be launched under attack without authorization. *(McN has several sketches that point to this -- author is saying it, ordering operations).*

If this were the case (a possibility never hinted at by any participants prior to 1987, and never made explicit or openly discussed to this day) it would imply that the threats of escalation (beyond tightening of the blockade) implied by military preparations for airstrike and invasion before and after the October 22 speech, discussed repeatedly in the ExComm meetings, and explicitly leaked through various channels, were to a considerable extent or perhaps wholly bluffs, aimed at improving the terms of trade in an eventual bargain and at managing the damaging image of such negotiations domestically.

What is inferred here--based plausibly on new evidence, which is less than conclusive--is a possible secret JFK three-part strategy for getting the Soviet missiles out of Cuba without a hot war (though probably not without significant political cost at home, which the strategy sought to minimize): (1) blockade, possibly progressively expanded; (2) threats (bluffs) of airstrike or invasion, accompanied by large-scale and visible preparations and aggressive reconnaissance; (3) negotiations, in which the US at least removed its missiles in Turkey as part of a deal (preferably proposed by Turkey or NATO, or by the UN).

From this perspective, it <sup>was to</sup> be negotiations, with real concessions by the US (and perhaps NATO!), that would actually get the Soviet missiles out. The prior blockade and threats would set the stage for these negotiations, impressing both the Soviets and the US domestic audience with the Administration's willingness to act boldly and aggressively, taking risks, in order both to get better terms from the Soviets (hopefully,

16-29: "new strategies" determined?  
 replacing 1-7: old strategy with possible "military" mission  
 (if missile could generate expense?)  
 or critical blockade/or (PSA/M): cover up till election



making no concessions on Berlin or Guantanamo, or elsewhere, other than in Turkey), and to make the actual terms palatable at home and in NATO: *an indication of balance, offering further to others not alligned to deal...*

(No one, neither hawk nor dove, seems to have imagined as a real possibility what actually happened: that a policy of blockade and threats alone might lead to Soviet withdrawal of its missiles, without the need to proceed to a third phase either of escalation or, as hypothesized here, a public trade signifying diplomatic parity. If anything, this surprise was more complete on the US side than that of the Soviet deployment in the first place; nor was it convincingly explained in the following quarter-century, although the core of the explanation became apparent in my secret study in 1964. How it came about, and the implications of its being a surprise at the time and uncomprehended long afterwards, are major subjects of this study.)

This hypothesis offers a basis for a relatively low estimate of the risk of war erupting from the confrontation, limiting this risk to the possibility that the process of threatening (bluffing) might have generated pressures, commitments or surprises that got out of the President's control and led to escalations beyond his original intent. But just how small was this residual risk, given what we know now? And how did the President and other advisors see it then? *See Doc; + see McNamara summit*

If an eventual trade, of at least the Turkish missiles, was acceptable and necessary from the beginning, how big a risk of war, and of nuclear war, looked to the President worth taking to improve appearances and the actual bargain? Did the President see this risk realistically; did he take all steps to minimize it? Was he justified, from any of these perspectives? *see book on Oct 23 (and 24) B-48*

B (87) 23-20. The President's clear personal position throughout Saturday, October 27, that the public trade of the missiles, proposed that morning by Khrushchev, was a reasonable and acceptable basis for ending the confrontation. This fact--first disclosed in the November 1987 release of the transcript, and not commented on since by any of the participants--is still flatly, falsely contradicted by McNamara's statement on the WGBH show cited earlier, that Khrushchev's proposed public trade was "inconceivable...inconceivable." (McNamara may have taped this statement before the publication of the transcript, but he knew better, and he could surely have had this falsehood edited out any time prior to the broadcast).

Thus, it was not inevitable but rather by giving way to his advisors--who did not anticipate the successful outcome the next morning--that the President chose to prolong the crisis by another 24 hours: during which US recon planes were being shot at, with the constant possibility of loss of control over events.



24. 21. Almost alone, McNamara deprecates the straightforward interpretations of RFK's messages to Dobrynin on the night of October 27 as constituting either an ultimatum, on the one hand, or <sup>(25)</sup> a secret trade of missiles, on the other. He cannot believe that RFK went beyond the terms of the small-group discussion before he met with Dobrynin, which he says did not include either a deadline or a definite threat of airstrike or invasion; nor does he see the assurance that the missiles would be removed from Turkey as a trade, but only as a description of a unilateral US policy: ignoring that no prior decision had been made by the President, and that RFK's assurance was conditional on the crisis having been settled satisfactorily.

The latter position by McNamara seems simply to be his continuation of the official cover story of 1962. The former skepticism may reflect his own position then of extreme reluctance to see such a threat carried out in 48 hours, or ever, and his belief the President felt the same way; this is consistent with the hypothesis mentioned in 19 above. Either the President or RFK might have decided, after the small-group discussion in which McNamara participated, to go beyond its terms in threatening; but consistent with McNamara's belief, the President--with or without RFK in agreement, or even knowing his mind--might have seen this explicit secret ultimatum as a bluff.

26. *mean while,*  
McNamara's positions raise the question what he thinks did bring Khrushchev's sudden concession on Sunday morning, without the public trade of the Turkish missiles and without any time pressure on the Soviets in the form of an ultimatum?

27. 22. The absence from ExComm thinking on Saturday, Oct. 27, of the possibility that Khrushchev had not ordered the firing of the SAM that destroyed our U-2, nor authorized Castro's firing on US low-level recon planes: both confirmed by the Soviets in 1987 and 1989.

In general, while expressing concern about possible loss of control, McNamara never gives any specifics about how this might have happened (other than possible launching of a Soviet nuclear missile by a low-level officer without authorization, under attack). It is not clear that he has yet realized how close such an escalation--undesired by him and the President--may have come, by the interaction of firing by Cubans and Soviets uncontrolled by the Kremlin and a specific ultimatum by RFK--relaying a commitment by the President and ExComm--on US response to a shootdown.

24. 23. The urgency and the meaning (problematic) of efforts on the afternoon and evening of October 27 to "defuse" (or remove the warheads from) IRBMs in Turkey (to my dismay, at the time).

(+ see Phil Rusk)

*(proof for strike? or for trade "good faith on removal" related to RFK offer)*

29. When he learned McN's law.

30. Lessons for VN: 1962, 1964, 1965 and lessons for RYM, NAK

29 March 1989: writing diary;

"argument" with Pat at lunch in the garden: Is it worth confronting the Kennedy School, laying out bluntly--e.g. for Sally Lilienthal, Ploughshares--just why it is not enough to support the KSchool in its historical studies: to look for adequate lessons to be drawn by analysts who hope to receive further contracts from the Defense Department; and who rely on testimony from former high-level responsible officials. (Such researchers will continue to be surprised, shocked, when others reveal that they have been lied to by their sources; as Chomsky says, their errors and naivete are motivated).

Pat says: if McNamara's program for future cooperation with the Soviets is good (as I say)...is it really worthwhile to expose him for his lies--in the same paper--about the past? (One could add: does it really help the cause to discredit him as an ally in terms of program: as on No First Use, like Colby on the Freeze?)

But the issue is: Is it worthwhile to try to learn from the past? Do we know enough--does the public know enough--about our past, so that it's time to get on with it, look to the future, making such alliances as we can?

The whole point of my work and of this project, purportedly, is to learn from our experience. Can traditional, established, authoritative accounts of that experience be allowed to stand unchallenged, when they are reiterated authoritatively in the present, when they are wrong, deliberately falsified and dangerously misleading?

Can we attempt, can we claim, to base our advice and our programs for the future on knowledge from experience, and make no effort to cleanse that knowledge of deliberate distortions? Can we lend our own authority, such as it is, and our silent acquiescence to former officials who are repeating old lies in the present, just to benefit from the full weight of their testimony where it is useful to our cause?

To be frank about the shortcomings of the Kennedy School "scholarship" and consultants to Ploughshares--or to anyone--is to risk appearing self-serving and rivalrous, backbiting; and to risk our own credibility with those like Sally Lilienthal, who apparently think highly of Nye, or McNamara, and Blight. And indeed, Blight's project is useful, deserving of support: as are many RAND projects. But to give money to the Kennedy School is not at all different from giving it to RAND; which is to say, it is very far from an adequate approach to valid, useful understanding of our past and present predicaments and of promising ways out.

Incredibly, MBG herself has mentioned him as a possible



consultant or participant in this very project. It is hard for me to come to terms with this. No one, except Patricia, knows better than Margaret what an incredible proposal that is to make to me. (Put aside that it was McNamara who blackballed me--and effectively, Margaret too--from the FAS meeting with Velikhov; that he refuses to be in a room with me; that he threatened to hurt me in my trial--i.e., to testify falsely that the PP had damaged national security--if he were forced to testify; saint that I am, I'm sure that these personal encounters do not bias my opinion of him.)

What limits his ability to contribute to a better understanding of our past, as having shaped our present and the obstacles to change, is his evident refusal to reconsider critically, his determination to defend in every dimension and particular, his own crucial involvement in that past, during the greatest buildup of nuclear arms in the postwar period prior to Reagan, including the most intense nuclear crises, a handful of aggressive interventions, instigation of one of the major programs of genocide (politicide) in the 20th century (Indonesia), and role as principal architect of the Vietnam War.

The point is not that he was once a Cold Warrior; so was I, and he is no longer. The point is that he seems determined not to rethink that experience: worse, he is not willing to undo any of the lies he himself told, and he is still repeating them. (If history doesn't matter all that much--as Fulbright once implied to me, in explaining why he wasn't taking the risk of putting out the Pentagon Papers, "After all, it's only history"; if it really doesn't matter all that much how people understand the past, all that matters is what we can agree we ought to do now; then why are these people still bothering to lie about the past?

Well, the answer might be: They don't want to admit their own past errors, their faults. They don't want to be blamed. They're human; and that's human. ("They're not like you and Bryan," said Pat today. ) OK; maybe my standards are too high; is that it?

But my interest is not, really, I don't think, in grading them. Judging them, condemning them, forcing them to confess and recant and repent. I want to get the story straight, and not just as a historian, but as someone who wants us all to be able to figure it out, to find out what we've been doing, so as to understand and predict better what we're still doing and are likely to do if we don't change: and how we might change it.

And these guys (McNamara, Bundy) aren't helping; they're still putting themselves in the way of that. It may be that they themselves want change, that their obscurantism and lies about the past are merely self-serving in a very personal, human way.

Yet they are effectively serving the same purposes as those



who consciously oppose change, who want more of the same and worse; they are supporting the cause of Reagan and Bush, the present regime in power, who agree with them that Truman and Eisenhower and Kennedy were exactly right in their successful tactics of confrontation (except for the limitations they put on our efforts in Korea and Indochina and Cuba) and disagree only when these former officials argue that the world has changed.

No, says the present administration to the Kennedy officials, you are right when you say were on the right track before; and all that's needed is that we not lose our nerve--as you guys seem to have done--keep our powder dry, keep buying the latest and best weapons--as your old bosses did--not drop our guard...

Whatever their all-too-human, narrow motives, these former officials agree too much with the ideological history of the current administration. (In terms of glasnost, they compare very unfavorably with current Soviet officials, as was painfully evident in the symposia in Cambridge and Moscow).

And it is not as if their approach were working, to the ends we now share. I note that they have never succeeded, not by an inch, over the last decade in their self-constrained project of attacking Reagan programs (which were started under Carter) without attacking Reagan history (which would indict their own past administrations).

Maybe that's just too hard: to try to discredit current programs by means of arguments that carefully refrain from discrediting past programs, which happen to have been identical. The constraint--to avoid providing any basis, even tacitly, for criticising the policies of one's past bosses--may simply be too confining, too burdensome, to allow one to mount an effective challenge to the same policies pursued by present leaders. Is that hard to imagine?

Of course, McNamara doesn't still claim that the past policies in which he participated were perfect. He admits, indeed he asserts, they were in some ways regrettable and dangerous, as were the Soviets', "because each leader, their associates and their peoples were captives of gross misperceptions and deep-seated mistrust--misperceptions and mistrust that exist to this day." (draft article, January 10, 1989).

Strong language! But is it accurate, valid? Or is it one more shuck, one more active contribution to dangerous public misperception? McNamara